TL 4996

SAMPLE LETTER TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ON EAST TIMOR

Dear Senator/Representative _____,

For many years, the plight of the people of East Timor has been a matter of deep concern to our Bishops' Conference and to many of us in dioceses across the country. The Catholic bishops of the United States have repeatedly expressed their concern about the civil and religious liberties of the people of that former Portuguese colony. Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo of Dili, recipient of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, has recently commented on the continued civil disturbances that are causing great suffering and growing resentment on the part of the people of East Timor, disturbances caused largely, in the bishop's view, by the heavy-handed excesses of the Indonesian military in the territory.

At this historic juncture, we are eager to lend whatever support we can to make real the promise of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize. We urge you to support those initiatives in the Congress that seek to impress upon the new Indonesian administration the need for a prompt resolution of the East Timor issue, based upon the freely expressed will of the people and in accord with the resolutions of the United Nations.

In view of the recent changes within the Indonesian government, this would seem an ideal time for the United States to press anew for a speedy resolution of the East Timor status question that, with the good offices of the United Nations, must be based on the freely expressed wishes of the people of East Timor.

While that longer-term goal is all-important, I ask that you press the Administration to advocate an imediate and genuine reduction of the Indonesian military presence in East Timor, the release of prisoners incarcerated for purely political reasons, the guarantee of freedom of speech and assembly, and an end to the abuses of peoples' human rights. Reducing the military presence and ending abuses could greatly enhance the prospects for a genuine solution to the East Timor tragedy.

With thanks for your thoughtful attention to this request, I remain

Sincerely yours,